

Good Stories for Children

By Walt McDougall

CRUEL ALFRED PIERPONT MOONEY GETS A COSTLY LESSON

Duffix, the Mosquito, Avenged the Wrongs of a Tiny White Dog that Had Been Horribly Mistreated by This Bad Boy, Who Delighted in the Poor Animal's Suffering

HERE was a boy lived near me whose name was Alfred Pierpont Mooney, and who was a very cruel boy, indeed. He would pull off the legs of flies to torture them; tie cans on dogs' tails; stone cats and in every way make life a terror to every small creature which he could capture. The reason Alfred did this was because he had in his brain some peculiar deformity that made him enjoy the sight of suffering just as other boys, who are made properly, enjoy the happiness of their pets. If Alfred could make a dog howl he was happy for an hour, and he never neglected an opportunity to inflict torture upon any small creature, no matter where he was. One day he caught a tiny white dog that belonged to a little girl and hung it up by the tail to a fence, where it howled so pitifully that he was delighted, but its howls attracted the attention of an enormous mastiff asleep in a yard near by, and the big dog rushed out, seized Alfred by the leg and bit him savagely in so many places that he couldn't begin to point them out to the doctor who was called to repair damages. He was put to bed, where he lay for days thinking how he could get even with the mastiff, and never thinking that he had been properly punished for cruelty at all.

Now, while he lay abed, and when his wounds were nearly well, so that he expected to be out next day, a mosquito bit him. Perhaps that seems a very ordinary thing to happen to any one, but this was no ordinary mosquito. You may have heard, for it's now perfectly well known, that mosquitoes infect people with various diseases, such as malaria, elephantiasis and yellow fever, and it is suspected that they are the cause of many other ills that trouble us. That bothersome, striped-legged mosquito called Culex, and another called Anopheles, are known to be the ones to dread, and when you see a Culex coming for you, dodge him and run with all your might. Now, the one that bit Alfred was called the Duffix, and he was very large and very poisonous, and he landed on the boy when he was sound asleep and squirted into him a whole lot of his special brand of poison, so that when he awoke there was a lump on his arm like a small egg that itched and smarted and burned so that he scratched it quite raw. He did not think much about it, however, except to remark how big the lump was and how sore, but the kind of poison which Duffix injects into one has the wonderful property of causing you to shrink and shrivel until you get to be as small as a toad or a mouse, no matter what the doctors give you; so look out for old Duffix above all. Alfred got out to play that morning, and to make him feel good his mother gave him a new "sail-boat," which he took to a small pond near by and placed in the water. He stood on the shore watching it sail and as the wind took it out toward the end of the pond, where the water ran out through a tiny stream into the big river, he noticed that all of the small shells, pebbles and sticks along the bank seemed much larger than he had ever seen them before. He did not know that already he was shrunk to the size of a doll; but that was what made everything seem so large to him. When the wind brought the sailboat to the shore he ran around to it and stood beside it. Then he found that he was so small that he was not as tall as the mast of the boat, and he was greatly alarmed, of course. He measured his height again and again, and was terrified, for he could not imagine what had happened to him. A dragonfly humming by startled him. It was so enormous and so wicked looking, and a minnow swimming close to shore to see what was going on seemed like a shark to his excited vision. When the dragonfly whizzed by again Alfred ducked his head, and then he found that he was so small that he only stood a few inches above the boat's gunwale.

THOUGHT HE WAS BEWITCHED

"I have certainly been bewitched!" he exclaimed. "Something has happened to me that's made me small!" Just then he heard a rushing sound, and a little white dog came hurriedly out from the bushes and ran, barking, at him. He was so frightened that he sprang into the boat, and as he jumped he pushed her off from the bank, and she shot out on the smooth water. The dog barked, but did not follow, and the wind taking the sail, the boat soon was so far away that it seemed to think it was of no use even to bark, and he scampered back into the bushes. Alfred steered the boat as it swept along the little stream leading to the river, and while it rocked perilously now and then, it sailed pretty smoothly as a rule. Soon the stream broadened and was shaded by big trees, and while gliding along beneath these something came hurtling down at Alfred—something all blue and green—with an awful shriek, that made him grovel in terror at the bottom of the boat. It was a kindger, but it seemed so big that it turned his blood cold. It missed his head by an inch, and then darted back, having most likely mistaken the little vessel for a new kind of fish. Alfred began to wish himself on shore, and steered toward the grassy bank, as he had no wish for another attack like that. The wind fell here in the lee of the trees, and soon he was carried far out on the bosom of the great river and was swiftly rushing along toward the sea. After awhile he became aware of a dark form in the water beneath, and watching it closely, discovered that it was a great fish whose dull but savage eyes were fixed upon him with a deadly glare. He trembled, for, like all cruel beasts, he was a coward at heart, and was glad when he found the boat approaching the ever shore in response to his pressure on the rudder. When he reached the shore he jumped out so swiftly that the little boat floated away before he could secure her, and so he lost all chance to return home the way he had come.

The grass was tall along shore and many queer sounds came from it as he pushed it aside and tried to get to the high bank. What things made these noises he could not guess, but they alarmed him exceedingly. Strange clackings, scratchings, rustlings, grunts and even growls came from all sides, and, worst of all, it was growing quite dark, as the sun had set and only the shining surface of the river was really light. The boy trembled with horror at the thought of staying out there alone all night surrounded by strange and dangerous animals, for he was now so small that he feared almost everything that was alive.

A dark hole opened before him when he came to the edge of the tall grass, and it seemed to him that it offered a safer place to spend the night than out in the air, so he stepped in. It seemed to lead away in under the bank of gravel, and also seemed rather damp. As he stood in the doorway, hesitating, the hole was entirely blocked up by the form of a big muskrat, who said:

"Hello! What do you want in my house?"

ALFRED LOST HIS BOAT

"I am shipwrecked," replied Alfred. "That is, I've lost my boat, and I didn't want to stay out here all night. Can I sleep in your hole?" "Oh, I suppose so," replied the muskrat, rather gruffly. "I heard some one rattling around as I sat at my other door, and came hurrying to see what it was. Thought it was a mouse."

"Are you afraid of mice?" asked Alfred. "Well, I should say I was," said the muskrat, wiggling his nose so that his whiskers wiggled against the wall on both sides. "You should see me sleep when he comes near! That's why I've two doors to my house, the other one being away down under water."

"It must be dreadfully damp and unhealthy," remarked Alfred, as he noticed the musty smell that came from the hole.

"Oh, if you think it's unhealthy you needn't enter, I'm sure," said the muskrat. "I don't invite you."

"I'd surely catch cold if I slept down there," said Alfred; "but I am afraid to sleep out here."

"No wonder," added the rat, "when the big owl and the wildcat are both roaming around here at the water's edge all night. One of them would surely get you, as you don't seem very swift on your feet."

"What shall I do?" asked Alfred, terrified.

"Well, there's a hole in the first tree yonder that's vacant since the Squazle went away. You might take that for the night, but no one knows when the Squazle may return."

"What's a Squazle?" asked Alfred. "I never heard of such a thing."

"It's an animal about as big as a kitten, perhaps; maybe a little larger, but he's terrible, indeed. He is as fierce as a lion, as cunning as a fox and as strong as a bear, and he can see as well in the dark as he



HE KNEW IT WAS THE SQUAZZLE.

can by day; he's much to be dreaded. Indeed, if he were not too large to get into my hole I'd fear him far more than I do the weasel or the boat-owl."

"I—I guess I'll stay with you to-night," said Alfred. "If he's likely to return."

"All right; I'll fix you up a nice bed of moss and you'll sleep like a top. I'm sure, unless there should happen to be a freshet to drown you out."

"Dear me!" sighed Alfred; "how many troubles you small animals have to put up with!"

"Well, I like that!" exclaimed the muskrat. "Small! Indeed! And how big do you think you are, pray?"

"I forgot that I'd shrunk to-day," replied Alfred. "I was most as tall as this bank this morning."

"He related what had happened to him, and when he had finished the rat exclaimed:

"Why, you have been bitten by a Duffix, that's what has happened! He always has that effect upon whoever he stings."

"I am in an awful scrape, whatever it was," said Alfred.

"You are, indeed, for you have no claws, no sharp teeth, you can't run fast, and you can't hear any better than a hoptoad. You are very badly provided to resist the attacks of pretty nearly everything that runs, crawls, flies or swims. I think. What a poor, pitiful thing a boy is, after all!" said the muskrat, reflectively, as he surveyed Alfred's small figure.

Alfred began to cry. "I wish I was home!" he sniffled. "I want my mamma."

MUSKRAT CALLED THE FIREFLIES

The muskrat called to a couple of fireflies to come and light the boy along his tunnel, and led the way down into the hole far under the bank. When they had gone about ten feet the tunnel was so wet that Alfred saw it was of no use to go farther, and said so.

"It's the best I can do," said the muskrat.

"We will show you a good, dry place," said the fireflies; "come with us."

They led him to a little sandy cave far up the bank where some soft moss had been gathered, and said:

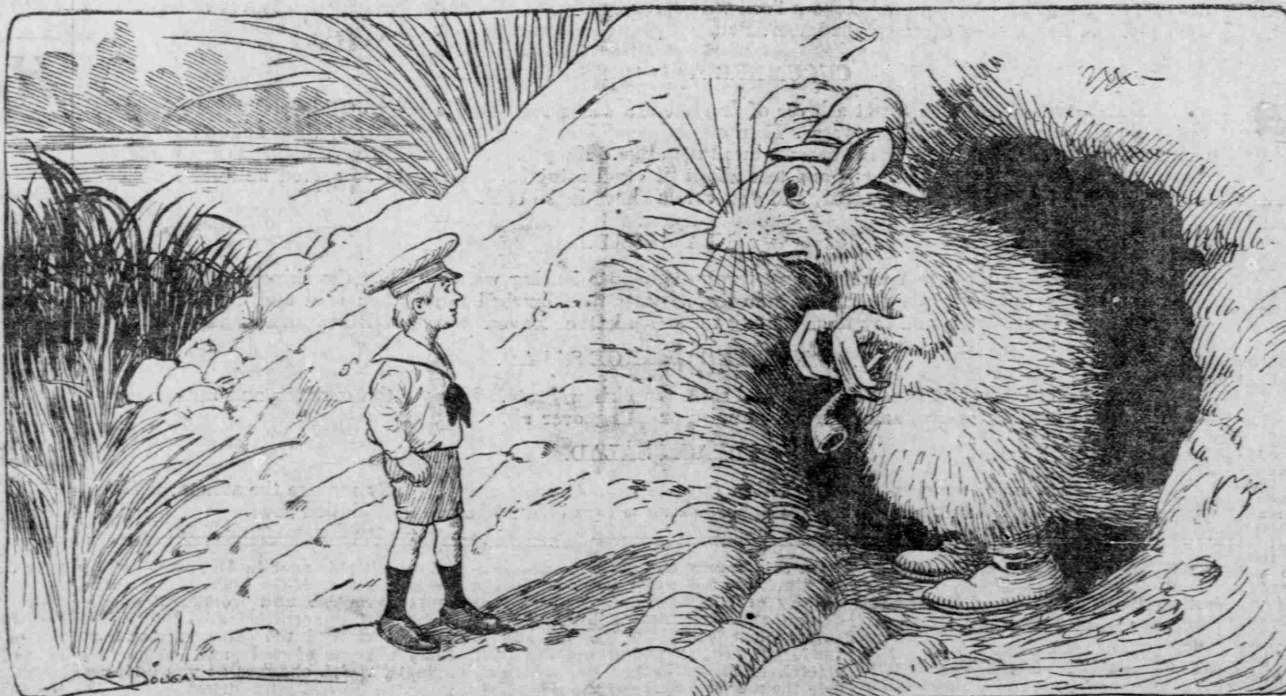
"Here's where the fox had her nest last spring. It's a fine place, too."

"It is," said Alfred, "but I do wish it had a front door."

"Yes," said the firefly. "Something may get you, I suppose, before morning; but we will stay by and warn you if we see anything."

So Alfred laid himself down in the moss and tried to sleep, but it was impossible, and he watched the stars until the dim light came in the east. Nothing came to disturb him, and his courage revived, but just as the sun was almost up he had a great fright. A big groundhog came plunging over the bank chased by a dog, and almost ran over the boy.

He vanished in the shadows of the thicket before the boy could even see what had frightened him. Then he heard the dog barking, and soon he heard him sniffing around above. He did not fear a dog, but when he thought how little he now was, he suddenly realized that the dog could make a mouthful of him and he crawled deep into the cave. But the dog passed on, hot after the groundhog, and took no notice of Alfred. He breathed easier, but when he looked out the fireflies had gone. Then he climbed up the sandy bank and saw that great woods were beyond. How to pass through them he could not tell, and yet he must, for it was impossible to remain there. He saw some apple trees that bore fruit so enormous that



AT THE MUSKRAT'S DOOR

It is Also Related How the Savage Squazle Met a Violent Death in a Struggle With Dan, the Faithful Setter Dog, Who Attacked the Monster Without a Sign of Fear

tiously out of a clump of grass and, with timid looks all around, began to nibble at some tender roots.

"I saw a trap over yonder," said one of them, "and it had the loveliest sweet apple in it! I was tempted to try to get it."

"Your greediness will finish you yet, if you are not careful," said the other. "I don't look at them at all, and that's how I resist."

"It's an awful temptation," sighed the other. "I do wish men would not place them in our way. Turnips are bad enough, but it's awful to have to refuse an apple."

"It is, I confess, but when I think that's how I lost both my father and mother the sight of an apple in a trap makes me shudder."

Just then they saw Alfred and began to tremble all over.

"I will not hurt you," said the boy, who by this time had begun to realize how all these small animals must live in a constant state of extreme terror and apprehension, and also to regret that he had ever been cruel to any of them. "I am only a boy," he continued.

"Yes, but boys will grow into men with guns and hurt us," said one rabbit, as he eyed Alfred. "But you're the smallest boy I ever saw! What are you doing here?"

"I am lost," said Alfred.

"Well, we can show you the way out of the woods," began one of the timid creatures, "but we can't go far with you—"

"Thank you," replied the boy, "but I am waiting here for a dog, a friend of mine, who—"

That was all the rabbits heard, for at the mention of a dog they both gave a start, wiggled their tails and in a jiffy had darted into the deepwoods. Alfred had to laugh, and when Dan returned he told him about it.

"I am sorry you didn't keep them here," said Dan. "It's quite a while since I chased a rabbit, and I would have enjoyed it, although, try as I may, I can never catch one."

"I am glad you had no chance, for the poor things are frightened enough as it is."

"They are scary things," said Dan. "Once, though, one of them, a mother with young, made a dash for me like a lion."

"What did you do?" asked Alfred.

"Why, I ran away, of course. Did you ever see a dog that wouldn't run if anything went for him suddenly?"

Then they went on and for a time Dan stayed by the boy dutifully, resisting several inducements to wander, but when they were almost through the dense woods he had to see where a big partridge had gone and left Alfred again to himself. As he sat on a fallen branch, looking about him, his eyes fell upon the trap mentioned by the rabbits. It had an apple upon a piece of wood in the center of a box, which was held up by three other pieces of wood, so that if the apple was touched ever so gently down would come the box and catch whatever touched the tempting apple. Alfred walked around the trap examining it, for he had never seen one before, and wondering how any animal could be foolish enough to walk into such a trap, when a sudden noise behind him caused him to jump and turn around in a fright. There, a few feet away, stood an animal the like of which he had never seen, even in picture books, and which he felt must be the terrible and much-dreaded Squazle. Although only a foot in height, it was, of course, simply enormous in his eyes, and so ferocious in appearance that he felt his hair rise and his flesh creep. His head was covered with long hair of a brilliant blue color, through which its eyes projected like a lobster's and moved to and fro like the tentacles of a cuttlefish. Its ears also stuck far up and spread out on their tips somewhat like a cat's. It had eight legs, all armed with long, white, curved claws, and its body, long, like a lizard's, was scaly, but marked with a well-defined plaid pattern. It was a horrible-looking creature and it teetered on the tips of its eight toes as if about to spring upon Alfred every moment. A cold perspiration broke out upon him, but he looked into the red eyes of the Squazle firmly, in the hope of staring him down, as he had heard of others doing to lions, tigers and polar bears. 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